

Editorial: Conflict and Confrontation: Engaging Estrangement

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As I reflect on the articles presented in this volume, the issue of human interconnectivity impressed itself through particular events: the collapse (with the loss of life of South Africans) of a building in the church grounds of the prophet T. B. Joshua in Nigeria, as well as the continuing destabilising of that country by Boko Haram; the killing of a black youth in Ferguson, USA with a concomitant rise in racial temperature; a similar rise of racial temperature in South Africa due to a tweet by a popular Afrikaans singer suggesting that black South Africans are responsible for apartheid; the release of a report on the South African observer mission to the 2002 Zimbabwean presidential election and the current reports to the run up to a new presidential election in that country. Amidst these issues, *Old Testament Essays* presents its readers with articles from authors from these countries (and others), some of them reflecting on the use of the biblical text in dangerous contexts.

Directly relevant to the Zimbabwean discourse, Temba Rugwiji looks bravely at the impact of its political crisis on Old Testament scholarship in Zimbabwe. He provides the reader with an overview of what Zimbabwean scholars have done recently, whether inside the country or as Diaspora. To him the task is to continue to offer a critique of a government not keeping to their constitutional mandate from an Old Testament or biblical perspective, because silence and failure to challenge will perpetuate oppressive and corrupt governments.

Helen Nambalirwa Nkabala reflects on the Bible use of the Lord's Resistance Army that is operative in Uganda and Southern Sudan. She looks specifically at the relationship between the roles of girls and women within the LRA and in the OT. She observes a link between what the OT texts present as roles of girls and women and the Lord's Resistance Army and that this link is the result of a patriarchal influence.

Hans-Georg Wüncsh shares with Nkabala research that enquires into the usage of the OT to advocate specific social orders. But Wüncsh's concern is his context in Germany where a quarter of the population has in various ways genealogical links outside Germany. He thus looks at the concept of stranger, foreigner or guest, questioning Kittel's advocacy for a "Fremdengesetz" based on the OT and that would have turned people (especially Jews) into second class citizens. Contrary to Kittel's interpretation that ostracised the foreigner, stranger or guest, he interprets Israel's history as one of integrating the foreigner, the stranger or the guest.

In terms of the reality of colonialism and its estranging effects, even in Bible translation, David Adamo queries the Yoruba Bible translation regarding the poor. He does not deem it authentically African. To him, the translation is unfortunate as it fails to take into consideration the Yoruba vocabularies for the poor. He provides an example in the Book of Psalms and presents the reader with another possibility from a polysemiotic approach.

Wynand Retief also deals with a translation problem, but his concern is more theological and canonical. Ps 8 poses translation problems in terms of the Masoretic text and the LXX. He argues for a consistent Messianic interpretation to which he ascribes the possibility of a pre-Christian tradition that was taken up by the early church. He suggests a polemic context in which the LXX with its rendition posed a problem for the witness of the church over against the synagogue.

Whereas Adamo presents the reader with a study on the words related to poverty in Hebrew and in Yoruba, Pinker looks at the referent implied in Job 24: 5-12, the onagers or wild asses. He argues that the referent is a single group which he labels the undesirables of a community. The term "undesirables" refers to those individuals unable to conform to the mores of the social group of which they are supposedly part of. They are described as "wild asses" (פָּרָא) and their community's intolerance towards them pushes them towards misery on the fringes of society.

Elelwani Farisani's essay focuses on two books that speak from the fringes of society, trying to overcome the estranging effect of colonialism. His article is an example of giving an authentic voice to theologising in that it is written in Venda, one of the eleven official languages of South Africa. Simultaneously, however, it creates inevitably an estranging effect within readers who do not know Venda. (Similarly, Pierre Auffret's as well as Benjamin Kilchör and Beat Weber's article would do the same amongst readers unable to read French or German.) Farisani engages with two commentaries on the topic of Ezra-Nehemiah: *The Africana Bible* (Fortress, 2010), *Africa Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 2006). He looks at the rationale, structure, content, contributors and methodology of each commentary and then engages with each commentary's article on Ezra-Nehemiah.

Related to Farisani talking with a particular South African ethnic and cultural group is Gerrie Snyman's response to the interrogation of coloniality from an African Biblical hermeneutics' point of view. Taking his cue from Cain as perpetrator, he seeks to understand the character of Haman as a perpetrator in tandem with the moral remainder that colonialism left on the West and on whiteness in South Africa.

A theme that underlies most of the abovementioned articles is that of conflict and confrontation. Shaul Bar's article deals with war. He discusses the

theme of war regarding the regime of Saul. He asks why the list of nations David fought was inserted in the history of Saul, implying he too fought these nations. He thinks there are historical and economic reasons Saul stood to gain from these wars.

Although Helen Efthimiadis-Keith's article is not about war, the book *Judith* which is the object of her research, deals with conflict and confrontation. She examines the role of Judith's genealogy in Judith 8:1 where the author constitutes an identity of YHWH's faithful community in using her genealogy to legitimate the community's rootedness in the major traditions of Israel. The author challenges the community to act as Judith did in their time of crisis (63 B.C.E.). The genealogy provides the community with the ability to re-interpret the ultra-retributational view of suffering as proof of sin and to see themselves thus as sanctified to YHWH.

Risimati Hobyane also engages with Judith. He reads the Judith story with a narrative analysis that is informed by Greimas's semiotic approach. He argues that *Judith* is a well-structured and balanced story as well as that the structure reveals a particular transformative development: the first part of *Judith* is a necessary preparation for the second part, without which the act of Judith itself in the second part would be without context.

Staying with the deuterocanonical books, Jacobus De Bruyn and Pierre Jordaen argue that *Bel and the Dragon* demonstrates the way gods other than the Jewish deity are emasculated. In effect a new reality and worldview are constructed within which the Jews in the diaspora could remain faithful to their God without being afraid of competing earthly powers or other so-called deities.

Father Pierre Auffret's short study on the Decalogue links up with the structuralism underlying the Greimasian approach. Auffret provides in French a structural analysis of the Decalogue in Exodus 20 and concludes that the text is organised concentrically around the commandment about the Sabbath.

Malan and Meyer address the issue of Deuteronomistic influence on the book of Jeremiah. They are rather more contrastive than indicative of the Deuteronomistic works. They test their hypothesis with Jeremiah 26-29 on the issue of prophecy. They conclude that the texts in Jeremiah have moved well beyond the Deuteronomistic works and that Jeremiah 26-29 in fact posits a critique to these other texts.

In contrast to Malan and Meyer's assertion that Jeremiah critiques Deuteronomistic works, Weber and Kilchör posits that Psalm 50, which they see as composed of prophetic speeches, is suggestive of underlying Pentateuchal traditions. They specifically argue that, given the liturgical setting

of covenant renewal, Deuteronomic traditions and texts and Levitical imprinting in particular form the background of the Psalm.

Olojede also addresses the issue of prophecy, but this time in the book of Daniel. She argues that Daniel should be regarded as more than a prophet because he combined elements of wisdom with prophecy. According to her, Daniel was able to combine wisdom with prophecy (she does not ignore the apocalyptic elements in the book) in a setting that did not guarantee liberty to Israelite prophets or allow them to freely ply their trade – she suggests the necessity for prophecy to take up the face of wisdom.

Ulrich’s research into Daniel poses the following question: why did Jesus and the authors of the Mathew and Mark interpret Daniel’s Antiochene prophecies (Dan 9: 24-27) typologically? He surveys the early Jewish exegesis (LXX, Maccabees, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, 1 Enoch, and the Book of Jubilees) in order to ascertain what may lie behind the Gospel writers’ typological reading of Daniel.

Picking up on *Bel and the Dragon* as court narrative, Widder enquires into the Joseph and Daniel narratives which may well have been part of the “court narrative” genre, but whose inclusion into the Hebrew and Christian canons requires a different understanding, namely as sacred texts in their biblical contexts, and not as isolated accounts in a literary vacuum. The Joseph and Daniel narratives create a model for God’s work among the nations in which he reaches out to foreign kings through the murky means of revelatory dreams.

This is the last issue in which Hans van Deventer from the North West University, Vanderbijlpark Campus, participated as article editor. As general editor I want to thank Hans for his work with *OTE*, especially his acumen to keep track of the articles and the peer reviewers and endless lists. He provided a solid framework for his successor, Hulisani Ramantswana, whom we welcome within the pages of *OTE* and whom we wish a fruitful engagement with authors, articles, peer reviewers, and administration!

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